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ABSTRACT

Identifying low self-esteem as the underlying factor contributing to poor school attitudes, negative self feelings, difficulty making friends, and difficulty in working independently and completing assignments, this action research project evaluated the effectiveness of an intervention incorporating cooperative learning and teaching to the multiple intelligences in a third grade class. The targeted population consisted of 22 third graders attending a midwestern elementary school in which almost half of the population comes from low income families. The problem of low self-esteem was documented through teacher anecdotal records, a teacher questionnaire, a student survey, and a parent survey. A survey of the literature revealed potential solutions to self-esteem problems, including experiencing self-accomplishment through real effort, feeling valued at home and school, and learning interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The 4-month intervention was comprised of a program incorporating weekly cooperative learning activities and teaching to the multiple intelligences. Weekly student journal entries were also included to encourage student reflection. Assessment methods of program effectiveness included a modified student survey, teacher anecdotal records, and student journal entries. Post-intervention data revealed an increase in students' self-esteem, an improvement in attitudes about school, more positive feelings about self, development of friendship skills, and an improvement in independent work completion. (Four appendices include the parent questionnaire, student survey, and teacher survey. Contains 16 references.) (Author/KB)

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SELF-ESTEEM IN THE CLASSROOM

Christa Rubin

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving low self-esteem. The targeted population consisted of third grade students in an elementary school where almost half of the school population is low-income. The school is located in a lower to middle class community near a large mid-western city. The problem of low self-esteem, as seen in the third grade students, was documented through teacher anecdotal records, a teacher questionnaire, a student survey, and a parent survey.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students exhibited low self-esteem, as exhibited by poor attitudes about school, negative feelings about themselves, trouble making friends, trouble working independently, and completing assignments. Faculty reports and a review of the research literature suggested that low self-esteem was related to a feeling of being unimportant, empty praise from parents and teachers, classroom structure, and teachers' control orientation.

A review of solution strategies suggested by researchers in the field of education, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the development of a program for improving self-esteem in the students which incorporated cooperative learning and teaching to the multiple intelligences.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' self-esteem, an improvement in attitudes about school, more positive feelings about themselves, development of friendship skills, and an improvement with independent work completion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT....1

General Statement of the Problem....1

Immediate Problem Context....1

The Surrounding Community....3

National Context of the Problem....4

CHAPTER 2 – PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION....7

Problem Evidence....7

Probable Causes....10

CHAPTER 3 – THE SOLUTION STRATEGY....16

Literature Review....16

Project Objectives....22

Project Processes....22

Project Action Plan....22

Methods of Assesssment....25

CHAPTER 4 – PROJECT RESULTS....26

Historical Description of the Intervention....26

Presentation and Analysis of Results....28

Conclusions and Recommendations....31

REFERENCES....34

APPENDIX

A PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE.....37

B STUDENT SURVEY.....39

C TEACHER SURVEY.....41

D LETTER TO THE PARENTS.....42

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement and the Problem

Some of the students of the targeted third grade class exhibit low self-esteem, as exhibited by poor attitudes about school, negative feelings about themselves, trouble making friends, trouble working independently and completing assignments. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher anecdotal records, a teacher questionnaire, a student survey, and a parent survey.

Immediate Problem Context

The problem of low self-esteem exists in a third grade classroom, housed in a neighborhood building comprised of first through sixth grade with approximately 700 students. Forty certified teachers and seven staff persons are employed at this site. The average teaching experience is 16 years. Twenty-three of the teachers have a master's degree. A principal manages the site. This site has self-contained classrooms with approximately 26 students in each class. A gymnasium also serves as the lunchroom. A separate music room and library resource center is available to all classes.

This site houses self-contained classes for first and second grade bilingual students. English as a second language (ESL) is also provided. Time devoted to the teaching of third grade core subjects, in minutes per day, are as followed: Mathematics-55 minutes, Science-25 minutes, English-150 minutes, and Social Studies-25 minutes. Self-contained learning disabled classrooms are housed at this site. Mainstreaming of these students is facilitated where indicated. Children with diagnosed needs see the appropriate resource teacher as indicated by their Individual Education Plan (IEP). Social work is provided at this site. A health clerk fills the duties of a nurse. This site does not employ an art teacher or a computer teacher. Classroom teachers are expected to teach art and computer skills, although a set curriculum has not been developed by the district. A speech teacher services the needs of those students with language and speech problems. A considerable percentage of students receive free hot lunch at this site.

Ethnic characteristics of the student population are as follows: 66.9% White, 28.1% Hispanic, 4.0% Black and 0.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Low-income students comprise 44.5% of the population, which is 10% higher than the state levels. Limited English Proficiency comprises 14.8% of the population. The attendance rate for this site is 94.8%, higher than state figures. The factors of student mobility, 29%, are higher than state figures. These percentages of the population are similar to the other schools in the district, but the percentage of the Hispanic population of the district is approximately 15% higher than state figures.

The Surrounding Community

The district is located 45 miles north of a large metropolitan area. It is a unit district serving the educational needs of approximately 5,300 students enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Ethnic characteristics of the district population are as follows: 64.7% White, 3.2% Black, 30.5% Hispanic, and 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Five neighborhood elementary schools feed into the junior high school building, which then feeds into the senior high school building. Voters elect the School Board and a superintendent is hired by the School Board.

The surrounding community has a total population of 31,000 residents in an area of nine square miles. The per capita income is $11,677, and the median household income is $33,026, while the mean household income is $36,515. The median property value is $72,300. New homes are expected to increase the student population by 250 by the year 2000. A new school building is needed, but the district lacks the necessary funds.

Each school in the district has a School Improvement Team that consists of teacher representatives from each grade level, the building administrator and parents. The focus of the School Improvement Team is to improve or maintain current instructional methods and strategies to raise the level of student achievement. The School Improvement Team supports programs such as Volunteers Involved In School Tutoring, V.I.S.T.A., and a Drug Awareness Resistance Education, D.A.R.E. The V.I.S.T.A. program allows volunteers to tutor and mentor students in

need during school hours. The D.A.R.E. program is a drug awareness program taught to the older children by the local police department. Risk Watch is a fire safety program taught by the local fire department and participating teachers.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of low self-esteem in school-age children has generated concern at many levels. Self-esteem is a combination of self-respect and self-confidence. There are many definitions for self-esteem. Self-esteem, self-worth and self-concept are often used interchangeably. Marshall (1989) stated that children with low self-esteem are likely to experience poor mental health and poor academic achievement. These behaviors are likely to elicit negative reactions from parents and alarm teachers to look for an underlying problem.

The way people come to see themselves, as they think significant others see them, is called self-appraisal. This is developed through role-playing. Cooley, (as cited in Felson & Zielinski, 1989) and Mead, (as cited in Felson & Zielinski, 1989) reported that parental support affects self-esteem because of the reflected appraisal. Children with high self-esteem will notice and remember positive reactions from parents. Children with low self-esteem will focus on the criticism they have received.

The problem of low self-esteem is a concern of teachers at the state and national level. Helping children feel good about themselves is an important goal of teachers. Feelings are not learned from direct instruction, but through respect and appreciation. Respecting and acceptance of children's feelings play an

important role in boosting their self-esteem (Katz, 1996).

According to Wiggins, Schatz and West (1994), the importance of self-esteem related to school achievement cannot be overemphasized. Children with a positive self-esteem act positively, assume responsibility, tolerate frustration, and are proud of their accomplishments. Children with a low self-esteem are easily led by others, become frustrated quickly, often blame others for their shortcomings and tend to avoid difficult situations (Wiggins et al., 1994).

The relationship between self-esteem and student achievement is significant. Amundson (1991) has reported:

> Students who have pride in themselves, who feel accepted by others, and who have goals for themselves...are better able to make decisions for themselves, become less vulnerable to impulsive risk taking, and turn out to be more successful in school. (p. 1)

Statistics indicate as students get older, their self-esteem often diminishes. Amundson (1991) explains that:

> -80 percent of kindergarten students have high self-esteem.
>
> -By the time students reach grade 5, the number has dropped to 20 percent.
>
> -By the time students graduate from high school, the number of students having a positive self-image drops to 5 percent.
>
> -Fewer than 2 percent of college seniors exhibit high self-esteem. (p. 4)

The problem of low self-esteem is evident at the local site as well as in the nation at large. Parents, schools and the larger community have an important role to

play in helping students develop positive self-esteem. However, the causes of low self-esteem must first be addressed.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Evidence of the low self-esteem among some of the third grade children at the site was documented through a parent survey, a student survey , a teacher questionnaire and anecdotal records.

Surveys

The parent survey (see Appendix A) was given to establish parental view of their child's school self-concept, especially in the areas of attitude about school, making friends, and challenging school work. Sixteen of the 22 parent surveys were returned, whereas 22 out of the 22 students completed the student survey in class (see Appendix B). Figure 1 shows that overall, parents had more of a positive view of what their children experience in school and with their peers. The surveys reveal that parents think their children are happier at school than they actually are. The children answered honestly, revealing that students do not always make friends easily and some prefer school-work to be easy rather than challenging. This data suggest that the problem of low self-esteem does exist. Teachers, as revealed through a questionnaire, also observed several characteristics of low self-esteem in their students.

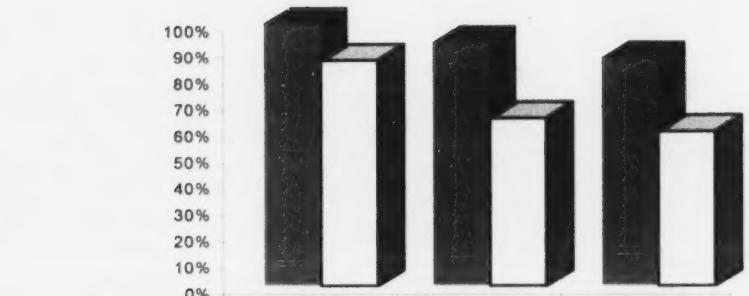

Figure 1. Views of Children's School and Self-Concept by Parent and Child.

Teacher Questionnaire

Seventeen out of 25 teachers completed a questionnaire asking if signs of low self-esteem were evident in their students. The following signs of low self-esteem were noted by teachers on a checklist: self-defeating attitude, trouble making friends, unhappy, unpopular, goofs off, experiences school-related failures, trouble working independently, trouble finishing school-work, little curiosity of learning something new, loses interest when activities are too challenging, lack of motivation and unsupportive parents. Each teacher noted that at least some of the children exhibited some or all of these behaviors.

The teachers responded to student attitudes about school. As shown in Figure 2, almost a quarter of the students displayed a negative attitude about school, as

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reported by their teacher. The teacher questionnaire also touched on the subject of friends, 9% feel they do not make friends easily. Teachers estimated that 24% of their students had difficulty finishing a task and finally, 34% of the children do not seem happy and motivated in school. The observations of the teachers clearly show a problem of low self-esteem with some of the students in every classroom. Further documentation was provided through anecdotal records.

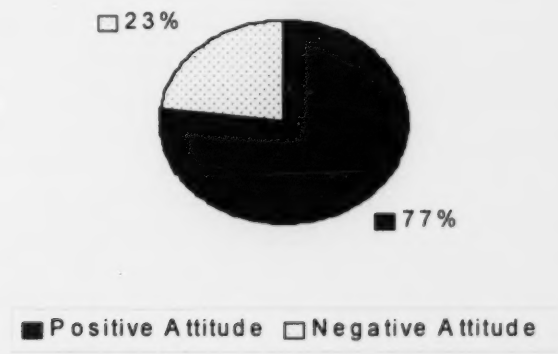

Figure 2. Teacher's Observations of Student Attitudes Towards School.

Anecdotal Records

Some of the children exhibit low self-esteem through behavior such as poor attitudes in school, negative feelings about themselves, trouble making friends, trouble working independently and completing assignments. These behaviors are also noted in teacher's anecdotal records.

One girl in particular has a very low self-esteem. She has trouble being friendly and not saying mean things. She seems unaware on the trouble she is causing when she puts others down. This is the same person who gets angry and begins arguing on

the spot if someone else says something about her. This person also has an attention problem in class and has not yet developed the responsibility of completing assignments and as a result is doing poorly in school. The school social worker and the school psychologist have provided the utmost support and have offered several different approaches to help this young girl's self-esteem and to help improve her social skills.

A boy with a poor attitude seeks attention from others by talking during class, acting silly, rocking on chair, talking back to the teacher and completing work in a rush without any regard to neatness. This boy is likable and smart, but displays low self-esteem through his poor attitude at school especially when he continually forgets his homework and assignment book at home. He also shows apathy when questioned about the homework. The parents have been notified and the process of helping this young man change his behavior and the raising of his self-esteem has begun.

The same children who argue with others in class and on the playground, are the same children with attention problems and poor attitudes in the classroom. Low self-esteem is rooted in a number of causes.

Probable Causes

Causes of low self-esteem in school-age children range from classroom structure and teachers' control orientation, empty praise from parents and teachers, and a feeling of being unimportant.

Classroom Structure and Teachers' Control Orientation

Students with low self-esteem rarely do well in school, regardless of their ability, and see no relationship between their efforts and their achievements (Amundson, 1991). Teachers may inadvertently focus on the negative when communicating with children while trying to get results sooner or in order to punish. Teachers who equate school success with personal self-worth can hinder students' self-esteem.

The classroom that promotes a positive self-concept is challenging and has high attainable expectations for students. Students gain self-esteem from putting forth effort to achieve. Research consistently shows that improved self-esteem is an outcome rather than a cause of success and achievement (Black, 1991). If the expectations are too high, students will give up resulting in a lower self-esteem and a negative self-concept (Stone & Rottier, 1996).

Classroom structure and teachers' control orientation influences children's self-concept (Marshall, 1989). Studies have compared the effects of "unidimensional" with those of "multidimensional" classrooms. In unidimensional classrooms, teachers group students according to ability, assign similar tasks, and publicly evaluate performance. In contrast, in multidimensional classrooms, teachers emphasize multiple dimensions of ability, have students work on a variety of different tasks using different materials at the same time, and evaluate students more privately (Rosenholtz & Rosenholtz, as cited in Marshall, 1989).

Several teachers at this site operate a "unidimensional" classroom. The children's desk are in rows and talking is not allowed. All students are expected to learn and complete assignments independently, regardless of ability. Exploration of learning through hands-on experience rarely occurs. Students have reported to find these classrooms boring, wanting more enjoyment and challenging activities in school.

Whether teachers support children's autonomy or tend to control children through external means, they will effect children's perceptions of competence and self-esteem. Children in classrooms that supported autonomy had higher perceptions of their own cognitive competence, self-worth, and motivation than those in classrooms where teachers retained control (Ryan, Connell & Deci, as cited in Marshall, 1989).

Classroom structure and teachers' control orientation causes low achievement when the environment is restrictive and not in tune with the young people in class. Low achievement will result if the students are publicly evaluated and given little time to express thoughts and feelings with the teacher and peers. Low self-esteem will result if the students are not supported and recognized.

Many teachers, with good intentions, openly praise and give stickers, candy or prizes for good behavior. These teachers often miss the mark when it comes to boosting the self-esteem of students by offering what is commonly known as empty praise.

Empty Praise

In the attempt of helping children feel good about themselves, teachers often

praise children's efforts. Frequent praise may be taken by children to mean that the praised behavior is not expected. The children will learn to act out the desired behavior merely to please the teacher (Katz, 1996). Another form of empty praise is the use of rewards, such as stickers or prizes. Teachers too often give meaningless praise instead of taking time to show the child how to do a better job. Meaningless praise removes from students practice in problem solving as well as the joy of accomplishment (Neuman, 1992). "Giving students rewards for work that requires little or no effort communicates the school's lack of faith in the students and diminishes their self-esteem" (Black, 1991, p. 29).

Another way self-esteem is diminished in students is through teachers not showing respect for their students. Children who behave badly in school are seeking attention from their teachers. Children with low self-esteem will believe they are unimportant if the teachers constantly react in a negative way.

A Feeling of Being Unimportant

Children need respect from the teacher in order to improve their self-concept (Stone & Rottier, 1996). It is very important for the teacher to separate the student from the behavior. Children with a positive view of themselves try new things with enthusiasm and approach peers and adults with confidence. Children with a negative view of themselves lack the self-belief to succeed in many situations. Young children's beliefs about whether they can or cannot do things influences how they approach new situations (Marshall, 1989). "Children behave consistently with the way they see

themselves" (Marshall, 1989, p. 44).

The self-concept of children is an important aspect of their psychosocial development. Their self-evaluations are reflected in their behavior and their ability to adjust to the demands of their environment (Haynes, 1990). If children view themselves negatively, lack discipline and are ill-mannered, they are likely to behave that way. Children become what they believe themselves to be (Haynes, 1990).

Children who move in and out of schools may feel lost in the shuffle, feeling unimportant and without a sense of belonging. One study reported that low self-esteem was caused by the mobility rate of the students. The study reported 80% of the students who moved in or out during the school year had tested low in self-esteem (Wiggins et al., 1994). One boy in the targeted class has moved several times, changing two to three schools in each of his primary years of school. He displays all of the low self-esteem characteristics and is performing poorly in school.

Students who have experienced failure may feel unimportant as well as incompetent. Students who have failed at something are inclined to prefer less challenging tasks than students who have succeeded. Similarly, students who have come to feel incompetent are less likely than others to be interested in what they are working on (Kohn,1994). One girl in particular stands out in the targeted class, having low self-esteem as well as several experiences of failure. This girl has a lack of discipline with the way she handles herself with peers and the way she rushes through work without any regard to accurate responses. Clearly, she feels unimportant to

people around her, and as a result reaches out in a negative manner by talking loudly, interrupting, and acting bossy with friends. The school social worker has worked closely with this student, creating a positive behavior chart. At the end of the week, she is able to choose a friend to share a playtime in the social worker's office, reinforcing good peer relations.

Children with low self-esteem see themselves as unimportant in the scheme of things, at school and most likely at home. Low school achievement, empty praise, and feelings of unimportance are probable causes of low self-esteem in children. Research supports solutions in helping children feel more successful.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of literature revealed several solutions to improving students' self-esteem. These solutions included experiencing self-accomplishment through real effort, feeling valued at home and school, and learning interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Self-Accomplishment

Children need activities that will provide a sense of accomplishment to bolster self-esteem, such as projects that are challenging and creative. Children need to be actively involved with what they are learning, and they need to feel the ownership of knowledge. Third graders feel a sense of pride as they accomplish the first paragraph writing experience. Through the process of brainstorming, mind mapping of topic, the children begin to write with the teacher's encouragement. Meaningful experiences that provide opportunities for real effort give children the needed sense of self-accomplishment (Katz, 1996).

Children need more manipulative and self-involving activities. When children

feel success in school and improve achievement, students with previously low self-concepts tend to improve self-perceptions (Hamachek, 1995). Parents and teachers play an important role not in helping the kids avoid failure, but in helping them cope constructively when they fail to get what they want (Katz, 1996). Katz (1996) notes that it is important to accept the child's feelings and respond respectfully so that the child learns from the incident. It is helpful to encourage children to recall a time when they struggled and eventually mastered a task.

Classroom portfolios successfully chart improvement in student achievement. Children with low self-esteem especially need to see exactly where they need improvement and more importantly, a follow-up with acknowledgment of the successes. The introductions of assignment notebooks and homework allows the children to develop responsibility for their learning. The learning process of following the school routine and completing homework in a timely manner enables the children to feel good about themselves.

Children will gain self-respect from taking ownership of their own achievements. Another solution to help children raise their self-esteem is by showing them respect by caring and listening. Children need to feel valued by parents and teachers.

Feeling Valued

Children's self-esteem is formed by the age of four or five and is derived largely from the students' home and family; schools have less impact. However, research clearly shows school can have some influence on a child's self-esteem (Black, 1991). The best way for a school to have a positive effect on students' self-esteem is to foster

an environment in which individuals are always respected and valued (Black, 1991).

Marshall (1989) suggests that teachers and parents help children feel they are of value by listening attentively to what the children say. Respecting children's ideas and asking for their suggestions helps children feel valued. Children will feel valued when they are treated with respect, when they are asked their views and preferences and are provided opportunities for real decisions and choices about the things that matter to them (Katz, 1994). Children should be encouraged to share ideas and opinions openly, as long as the sharing contributes a positive feeling to the class. The children should be allowed to correct each other, in a polite manner, if put-downs are used or if someone is not working in class. Children are therefore, learning to value each other through the development of listening and social skills. The children should be encouraged to take care of the classroom, from cleaning to the organization of books, games, and supplies.

Students feel valued when teachers show appreciation (Katz, 1994). Instead of general praise, a direct appreciation is a personal response so that the child feels valued. Glazer (1997) wrote that direct praise, mentioning the desired behavior, gives students feedback that is unambiguous, immediate, yet also corrective. Direct praise reinforces correct responses, which reduces incorrect ones and provides children with the opportunity to take risks. When the teachers use direct praise, children's self-confidence rises, and performances improve (Glazer, 1997). Teachers must provide direct appreciation in a personal response related directly to the child's interest and effort. Each child needs to feel noticed each day. This can be easily done by

circulating the room several times during the day and checking on the students' work. A simple, positive comment about a student's work may help the student to feel special. For example, when checking the daily assignment books, students should be given direct praise or given a quiet pep talk about the importance of completing homework.

Another solution to help increase students' self-esteem is to teach intra- and interpersonal skills. Self-knowledge and people skills help students to feel connected to others, giving them a sense of belonging and thereby increasing self-esteem.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences holds that every individual possesses a unique capacity for solving problems (Chapman, 1993). Two of the intelligences that reflect a personal vision of self are the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. The development of each intelligence depends on how the individual is nurtured. Intrapersonal is the ability to understand one's own feelings. Interpersonal intelligence is one that focuses outward to other individuals, a talent for understanding others (Chapman, 1993).

Children's social self-concept is related to the knowledge of how to interact appropriately with peers and how to enhance peer acceptance and liking (Marshall, 1989). Parents and teachers need to help children learn skills to interact with others by giving them the words they need to express their desires and feelings, by helping them play, and by teaching them how to resolve conflicts (Marshall, 1989). If a problem of getting along in the classroom or on the playground arises, children should be encouraged to think of other people's feelings, self-reflect about the

conflict in a writing journal and then the take the opportunity to talk about the conflict with the peers involved. Learning to solve personal conflicts leads to increased self-esteem.

A good classroom climate will nurture the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences so to set the stage for positive things to happen. A positive way to start the school day is to greet each child with a hand shake and a smile. This simple greeting welcomes each child to school, setting the stage for the rest of the day and giving each child a way to practice an important social skill.

Simonson (1992) suggests that having students compile a memory scrapbook during the school year will help the students feel good about themselves. The scrapbook will have several sections: reflective writings, monthly activities, special writings and projects, achievements, and social activities. This year-long project will be treasured by the students and their parents for years. By helping students feel good about themselves and nurturing their intrapersonal intelligence, this will be helping them to succeed.

It is the classroom teacher's role to make a time and safe place for each child to reflect on his or her learning goals (Chapman, 1993). The intrapersonal intelligence is the most private, and the teacher must create a risk-free environment that encourages student reflections. Journal writing allows for children to process their thinking in written form. A journal is a personal record of the connections being made within the student's cognitive thinking. A journal is a pathway to higher thought (Chapman, 1993).

Schools can create an environment that supports and nurtures students' self-perceptions by giving students opportunities to earn respect with peers (Black, 1991). Schools that emphasize cooperation over competition give students a chance to work together instead of alone. Research has indicated that cooperative-learning groups enhance student achievement as well as promoting self-esteem, improved interpersonal skills and improved attitudes toward school and peers (Lampe, Rooze & Tallent-Runnels, 1996).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative grouping is an enjoyable experience for all students. Children are able to learn important lifelong social skills as they communicate and problem solve with their peers. Self-esteem and approval of classmates can be lower in individualistic learning situations than in cooperative ones (Johnson & Johnson as cited in Lampe, Rooze & Tallent-Runnels, 1996). Cooperative grouping is being a team member and learning the responsibility of each job. Two, three or four people work closely together on a given task fulfilling these roles: the material manager, the person who gathers paper, markers and any other material needed; the recorder, the person who writes down information; the reporter, the person who speaks or reports to the large group after the task is completed; and the timekeeper, the person who watches the clock. Feeling the success of teamwork and feeling of importance, gives each student a purpose for learning and a positive affect on their self-esteem. Cooperative learning in the classroom inspires creativity, friendship and the quest for more knowledge.

Children will improve self-esteem through experiencing self-accomplishment.

Feeling valued by parents and teachers plays an important role in supporting high self-esteem. Through the learning process of relating with each other, each person will develop an understanding of their own feelings and goals.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of learning through multiple intelligences, cooperative group activities, and reflective journal writing during the period of September, 1998 to December, 1998, the targeted third grade students will improve their self-concept. Their progress will be measured by teacher anecdotal records, student surveys and reflection journals.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Assess pre-intervention self-concept and attitudes toward school.
2. Define group roles, responsibilities and expectations for cooperative activities.
3. Model reflective journal writing and provide prompts to encourage student reflection.
4. Create lessons that incorporate multiple intelligences.
5. Include cooperative activities, lessons in the multiple intelligences, and journal writing opportunities and combinations of these.

Action Plan for Intervention

The following steps will be taken to implement the intervention:

I. Assess pre-intervention self-concept and attitudes toward school.

WHO both students and their parents

WHAT complete a survey about self-concept and school

WHEN the second week of school (September, 1998)

WHY to assess their self-concept prior to intervention in order to have a baseline by which to measure improvement or growth

II. Define group roles, responsibilities and expectations for cooperative activities.

WHO the teacher researcher

WHAT 1. provide clear expectations of a student's role and responsibilities as a member of a cooperative group

2. use role playing to teach the mechanics of cooperative groups

WHEN the first week of school (August, 1998) and a review of expectations prior to each cooperative activity throughout the semester

WHY to provide clear standards that the teacher researcher feels the students should exhibit when working on a cooperative task so that the students understand and meet what is expected of them

III. Model reflective journal writing and provide prompts to encourage student reflection.

WHO the teacher researcher

WHAT 1. model reflective journal writing, provide visuals

2. create and display prompts to encourage student reflection

WHEN the first two weeks of school (August, 1998)

WHY to provide clear expectations and prompts to aid students in completing their journals

IV. Create lessons that incorporate multiple intelligences

WHO the teacher researcher

WHAT weekly lessons planned using combinations of intelligences

WHEN first week of school (August, 1998) through first semester (December, 1998)

WHY to provide a variety of learning styles for the students

V. Include cooperative activities, lessons in the multiple intelligences, and journal writing opportunities within the curriculum

WHO the teacher researcher

WHAT cooperative activities, lessons in the multiple intelligences, and journal writing opportunities and combinations of these

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

WHEN providing cooperative activities , approximately one per week, which would allow for at least 12 activities during the intervention.

WHY to enable the students to learn from each other and participate as a group working to solve a problem

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

WHEN the first week of school (August, 1998) and weekly opportunities throughout the semester

WHY to teach the students to be better learners using all of their intelligences

JOURNAL WRITING

WHEN minimum of 1 reflective journal per week

WHY allows students to reflect and deepen their understanding about themselves, gives value to the students' feelings and thinking, and provides an opportunity for both the teacher and student to receive feedback.

Methods of Assessment

A modified version of the original student survey will be used to assess any change in student attitude about school and feelings about themselves. Teacher anecdotal records will be maintained and evaluated for changes in displays of positive or negative attitudes towards school and self. Also, the weekly reflective journals will be read in order to gain feedback from the students that might demonstrate change in attitude.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of the project was to increase students' self-esteem at school. The implementation of cooperative learning, reflective journal writing, and lessons using multiple intelligences were selected to effect the desired changes.

Cooperative learning was used to teach social skills, such as being a good listener, taking turns, respecting others, getting along with others, being a good friend, and using positive language in the classroom. Clear expectations of the student's role and responsibilities were explained through modeling and role playing. Jobs employed during cooperative group work were of a material manager, recorder, reporter, and sometimes time keeper or put-up manager. Groups were chosen at random by numbering off, lining up according to birthdays, lining up according to height, finding partner with same button or same piece of candy. If conflicts arose, the groups were rearranged. The groups changed each time the class participated in cooperative groups.
A class list of put-ups and put downs clearly established acceptable language.

A list of "you are special" words hung in the classroom for all to see and use daily. Whole group discussion led by the teacher allowed for a positive exchange of ideas. After the "put-up" and "special" words were established, a game was played to let everyone feel energized about being special in their own way. Everyone wore a paper plate tied with yarn around their neck, and let it hang in the back, even the teacher. Each person traveled around the room with a marker in hand, writing a special word on each person's back.

Another bonding experience was creating a "t-shirt" on posterboard, an All About Us project, gave the students a chance to share personal information, and yet create a team spirit in the class. The t-shirts were completed in time for Open House and hung in the lobby for visitors to read about each student's goals for third grade. Developing team spirit continued as cooperative groups brainstormed a list of "Can-Do Attitudes", positive ways to be productive at school. Lists were hung in the hallway to share with other students.

Reflective journal writing was modeled with prompts given to encourage student reflection. Journal writing focused on things learned in cooperative groups, positive and negative experiences of working in a group, and personal feelings about school. Reflective journal writing gave value to the students' feelings and thinking and helped to develop the intrapersonal intelligence of each student.

Lessons with multiple intelligences helped students to be better learners using all of their intelligences. Singing and theater experiences were used to tap

into the musical and kinesthetic intelligences. Art projects throughout the curriculum allowed the students to express themselves creatively. Nature walks, a trip to the zoo, and a walk on the beach of Lake Michigan placed learning outside of the classroom. Multiple intelligences were used in all areas of the curriculum each week. The data collected through student surveys and the teacher's weekly journal was used an assessment of the positive change in self-esteem in the classroom throughout the first semester of third grade.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of cooperative learning, reflective journal writing, and lessons with multiple intelligences on improving the students' self-esteem in the classroom, a student pre- and post-survey was given, teacher anecdotal records and observations were recorded, and the students engaged in reflective journaling.

Student Survey

A student post-survey was given upon completion of the action research project, and it was compared to the results of the initial pre-survey. The numbers reflect the percentage of students who agreed they were positive about school, made friends easily, and liked challenging school-work. Table 1 reveals that most of the children are positive about school, almost the same percentage of children are positive about school as in the beginning of the school-year. There was a 12% increase in the students' view that they make friends easily and a 21% increase about wanting challenging work in school.

Table 1

Comparison of Student Pre/Post Survey

Child's View of Self in School	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Positive about school	86%	84%
Makes friends easily	64%	76%
Likes challenging work	59%	80%

Two of the three areas in the child's view of self showed improvement. Making friends easily and liking challenging work positively increased, but being positive about school remained about the same. Students' self-esteem showed improvement through the student survey and teacher anecdotal records.

Anecdotal Records

Teacher anecdotal records noted that several children showed signs of low self-esteem at the beginning of the school-year. There were incidents of children having trouble getting along with other children, not waiting for a turn to talk in class, blurting out answers, getting angry when not called on, not completing assignments, exhibiting poor listening skills, daydreaming, displaying a negative attitude, and rarely laughing or smiling.

The class activity of listing "put-ups" and "put downs" led to an enjoyable experience of writing special words on paper plates hung on each person's back. Although some children were wound-up, everyone had big smile to prove the personal joy from being a part of the activity. This was a terrific bonding experience for the class.

Before each cooperative group activity, the group spent time discussing rules of working together, especially good ways to share ideas. A wrap-up of positive and negative things after each activity allowed the children to share thoughts and feelings. Respectful and honest comments from each other helped the children to improve social skills. The children said they liked group activities because they were fun, it didn't feel like working, and they were able to talk to their friends. Other comments indicated that some of the children acted silly and did not participate enough. Some of the children had a difficult time working within the cooperative group structure wanting to work alone or interrupt the group's work. After several experiences of cooperative activities, most children enjoyed working with others and took their jobs seriously.

Teacher anecdotal records noted that most groups exhibited positive and creative participation during group activities, such as smiling, leaning in to hear the speaker, talking freely, and the willingness to write and draw pictures. Some had difficulty participating and incidences of arguing occurred at times. The children who argued had trouble sharing markers and waiting their turn to participate in the activity. Those groups were split up if group work did not successfully continue. Teacher anecdotal records and student journal writing noted signs of personal growth with each of the students.

Student Journaling

Reflective journaling enabled the students to self-reflect on how they felt about school. Journal writing provided an opportunity for both the teacher and

the student to receive feedback. Personal growth was evident over time through written expression in the journals. The students were asked to write about what they liked about school and what they did not like. Many of the children wrote at the beginning of the school year that they preferred work to be easier so they could finish quickly. As time went by, the students gained more confidence and began to write that they prefer more challenging work so that they could learn more. The change in attitude was expressed through writing and carried over into their daily experiences. Students learned ways to be a good friend, they discovered why they believe learning is important, and most of all, students learned to believe in themselves. Based on the analysis of the data, many conclusions and recommendations can be drawn.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on teacher observation, teacher anecdotal records, and student surveys, the students showed an increase in self-esteem. This increase could be attributed to the classroom routine engaging in cooperative group activities, reflective journaling time, and lessons addressing multiple intelligences. Attitudes improved as classroom rules and consequences were established with the input of students. Friendships were formed and the class developed a team feeling during cooperative learning.

At the beginning of the school-year, several third grade students felt they did not make friends easily and would rather complete easy work instead of challenging work. After the first semester, improvement was noted in several

areas. The children were happier in school, friendships were blossoming, fewer incidents of misbehavior occurred, and more time was spent on-task completing assignments. Only a few students remained negative about school and those students had self-control problems, such as inattentiveness, off-task behavior, and excessive talking during classtime. These were the same students who found it difficult to get along and participate in small, cooperative groups.

Teachers need guidance and support through staff developments to successfully implement cooperative learning. The whole school needs to participate in the best practices of learning. Change takes time, therefore, continued support needs to be in place following staff developments. Cooperative learning allows for each student to express themselves while learning to think and speak without fear of failure in front of the whole class. Working together to solve problems is a valuable life skill and in the process, a booster of self-esteem.

Teachers and parents play an important role in teaching children to believe in themselves. A positive school experience will improve negative feelings and attitudes if the children accept the responsibilities of their own actions and learning. Consequences and guidelines will help children to feel good about themselves, at school and at home. The teacher researcher believes that the intervention should have included set consequences for classroom misbehavior. Several of the students exhibiting misbehavior, also displayed low self-esteem and are the same students who needed much of the

teacher's time. If misbehavior is handled in a fair and constructive way, the students will learn what is appropriate and what is not appropriate behavior, and at the same time, retain their dignity and self-esteem.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, low self-esteem in students has many causes. Classroom structure, teachers' control orientation, empty praise from parents and teachers, and a feeling of being unimportant, all play an important role in causing low self-esteem. Teachers need to be aware that they have great influence of how their students feel and think of themselves in school. Each child needs to feel special for just being themselves. Feelings are not learned from direct instruction, but through respect and appreciation.

The relationship between positive self-esteem and school achievement indicate that children can be taught to think and act positively, assume responsibility, reach goals, and be proud of accomplishments. Students who have pride in themselves, feel accepted by others, but most importantly, learn self-acceptance.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Questionnaire

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE: SELF-CONCEPT & SCHOOL

Does your child talk positively about school?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Does your child talk negatively about school?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Has your child ever shared a success story about school?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Does your child make friends easily?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Does your child seem happy and motivated to do well in school?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Is your child assertive in social situations?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Has your child had any school-related failures?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Does your child usually finish what he/she has started?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Does your child take school seriously?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Is your child able to work independently?	*Always Sometimes Never*
Is your child curious about the world around him/her?	*Always Sometimes Never*

Does your child enjoy school-work that is difficult and challenging? *Always Sometimes Never*

The following questions relate to your child's homework routine. Please circle yes or no.

Do you help your child with his/her homework? *yes no*

Do you explain the directions? *yes no*

Does your child usually understand what to do? *yes no*

Do you check over the answers when your child is finished? *yes no*

Does your child enjoy doing his/her homework? *yes no*

Does you child feel successful after doing his/her homework? *yes no*

Please list any after-school activities your child is involved in. (baseball, soccer, dance, scouts...)

_____

_____

_____

Additional comments about your child:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B
Student Survey

SCHOOL AND SELF-CONCEPT: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL?

Directions: Read the questions and circle yes or no.

Do you like school?	*yes*	*no*
Do you make friends easily?	*yes*	*no*
Do you like working with other people at school?	*yes*	*no*
Do you usually finish what you start?	*yes*	*no*
Do you want to do well in school?	*yes*	*no*
Do you think homework is important?	*yes*	*no*
Do you think completing homework is important?	*yes*	*no*
Do your parents help you with homework?	*yes*	*no*
Are you able to work by yourself on school-work?	*yes*	*no*
Do you like school-work to be challenging?	*yes*	*no*

SCHOOL AND SELF-CONCEPT
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL?

What do you like about school? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What don't you like about school? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Tell me about a time you felt you did your best at school._____

_____

_____

_____

Do you like school-work to be easy or challenging? Why? _____

_____

_____

Appendix C
Teacher Survey

Teacher Name_____ Date_____

The following characteristics describe the behaviors and experiences of low self-esteem. Please check the following characteristics you observe or have observed in your students.

___ self-defeating attitude
___has trouble making friends
___unhappy
___unpopular
___goofs off
___experiences school-related failures
___trouble working independently
___trouble finishing school-work
___little curiousity of learning something new
___loses interest when activities are too challenging
___lack of motivation
___unsupportive parents

Think about your new students in your class. Please answer the following questions.

How many children are in your class? ____

Estimate how many have a positive attitude about school. ____

Estimate how many have a negative attitude about school. ____

Are there children who do not make friends easily? Estimate how many. ____

Estimate how many children have difficulty finishing a task. ____

Estimate how many children are happy and motivated to do well in school. ____

Appendix D
Letter to the Parents

August 27, 1998

Dear Parents,

I am working toward the completion of my Master of Arts degree in Teaching and Leadership through Saint Xavier University. As part of my program, I will be conducting an action research project to improve the self-esteem of my students.

Your child may be included in the collection of data through various activities in our third grade day. We will be involved with learning in cooperative groups, writing in reflective journals, creating portfolios, and engaging in activities that promote learning through all of the intelligences.

All of the children will participate in the above activities as part of of our normal day. I will collect data during the first semester of third grade, but the same learning styles will continue for the remainder of the school-year. All participants will remain confidential. Please let me know if you do not want your child's data to be used for my action research project. I expect this to be a rewarding experience for your child. The children will learn more about themselves and discover their unique learning styles. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school: (847)546-8243.

Sincerely,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mrs. Christa Rubin